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BELIEFS, RITES, AND CUSTOMS OF THE JEWS,  
CONNECTED WITH DEATH, BURIAL, AND  
MOURNING.

(AS ILLUSTRATED BY THE BIBLE AND LATER JEWISH  
LITERATURE.)

V.

THE next step preliminary to burial is to prepare the corpse by a process of purification for its journey to its eternal home. This sacred task is usually fulfilled by the members of a religious confraternity known as קְהֵל קַדִּישִׁים, who have voluntarily taken upon themselves to discharge all the rites connected with death and burial. Their varied duties are covered by the word *συγκομίζειν*, occurring in Acts viii. 2.

The water required for the cleansing of the dead has to be warmed. The ceremonial of washing the corpse must not be performed by one person alone, not even in the case of a child. The dead must likewise not be moved from one position to another by fewer than two persons. The corpse is first laid on a deal board, with its feet turned towards the door, and covered with a clean sheet. The body is undressed as far as the inner shirt, which is then rent through from the breast downward in such a manner that the corpse shall remain covered throughout. The corpse is now washed from head to foot in lukewarm water, during which process the mouth is covered, so that no water should trickle down it.

First, the dead lies with face lifted upward ; it is next inclined upon the right side while the left side and part of the back are being washed, and is then turned on to the

left side while the right side and the remaining portion of the back are being subjected to the same treatment, the corpse being afterwards laid on its back. In some cases the nails are cut, but generally they are simply cleaned with a special kind of pin, while the hair is often arranged in the manner in which it was worn in life. In ancient times the hair was cut (T. B. *Moed. Kat.*, 8b), but it is now only washed, and nine measures of cold water are subsequently poured over the corpse (during which, in some places, the dead is settled in an upright position), and this constitutes the actual religious purification technically known as טְהוּרָה.

While this ceremonial is being carried out, some verses are recited by those who officiate, concluding with the words: "And I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean" (Ezekiel xxxvi. 25).

The corpse is, of course, thoroughly dried, care being taken not to leave it uncovered the while. Women have to undergo the same process of purification at the hands of their own sex. In Acts ix. 37 we have an instance of a woman being washed before burial in New Testament times.

The board on which the corpse lay is cleansed, and all the water that may have been spilt around about is cleared up, so that no one should pass over it. The overturning of the board is fraught with danger, and any one might die in consequence within three days afterwards (*Testament of R. Jehuda Chasid*. VI.).

It was formerly the custom also to anoint the corpse, after cleansing, with various kinds of aromatic spices, בְּשָׂמִים וְשֵׁל מְרִים. It will be remembered that when Mary was reproached with an unnecessary waste of ointment, Jesus exclaimed, "Suffer her to keep it against the day of my burial" (John xii. 7). And we find it recorded that a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about 100 lbs. weight, was subsequently brought for the body of Jesus (*Ibid.* xix. 39). The custom of actual embalming, as understood

by the Egyptians, does not seem to have found favour with the Jews, as instances of the practice are extremely rare in the history of Israel.

The legendary character of stories such as that Herod preserved the corpse of a girl in honey for seven years, and that the corpse of Eleazer bar Simeon was confined in a garret for twenty-two years is, as Perles truly remarks, self-apparent.

For examples of swathing the corpse in spices, cf. Matt. xxvi. 12; Mark xiv. 8; xvi. 1; Luke xxiii. 56; xxiv. 1; John xix. 39 f.

After the rite of purification has been carried out in the customary manner, the corpse is clothed in grave-vestments, commonly called תכריכין (*Mish. Sanhed. vi. 5*), or metaphorically זוררת, provision for a journey (*T.B. Erub. 41a*). They are identical with the σενδών of the New Testament (cf. Matt. xxvii. 59, etc.), being made of white linen (סדין) without the slightest ornament, and must be stainless. They are usually the work of women, and are simply pieced together, no knots being permitted, according to some, in token that the mind of the dead is disentangled of the cares of this life, but in the opinion of others, as representing the expression of a wish that the bones of the dead may be speedily dissolved into their primitive dust (*Rokéach, 316*).

The outfit of the dead usually comprises מצנפת, a cap or mitre, מכנסיים, breeches, כרונית, shirt, סרגנס, a garment resembling a surplice, and חגרה, girdle. No corpse, male or female, must be clothed in less than three garments. Over these is placed the prayer cloak טלית, usually worn by the Jews during divine worship, with one of the fringes torn off the corner to which it is attached. In the case of women, an apron, סינור, is supplied instead of מכנסיים. Women also dispense with the טלית, as it is not worn by members of the female sex in life. Very frequently the white shroud used by strict Jews on New Year's Day, the Day of Atonement, and the Passover "night of observance,"

forms part of their grave apparel. "It is the custom in some countries that the bride presents the bridegroom with this article on the wedding day" (*The Jewish Religion*, Friedlander, p. 492, Note 2). The cerements correspond to the garments worn by the High Priest in days of old. The regulations (set forth above) with regard to the מִתְהַרֵּה and the mode of dressing the dead are post-Talmudic; see the סֵפֶר הַחַיִּים, a work compiled early in the last century, by Rabbi Simeon Frankfurter, and edited with an English translation and notes, under the title of *Book of Life*, by the Rev. B. H. Ascher.

The making of the several vestments to be worn by the departed is esteemed as a מִצְוָה and we are told (*Ruth Rab.*, I. 8) that the kindness which Naomi's daughter-in-law showed to the dead (*Ruth* i. 8) consisted in her having prepared grave-clothes for them. *Apropos* of this, the Targ. Jerus. has a remarkable rendering of Deut. xxvi. 14: : לֹא אֶכְלְהִי בְּאֵנִי מִמֶּנּוּ.....וְלֹא נָתַתִּי מִמֶּנּוּ לְמֵת: "I have not defrayed therefrom the expense of grave-vestments." (For a note on this interpretation, see Geiger's *Urschrift*, p. 479.)

It is strange that שְׁעִטָּה, "a mingled stuff, wool and linen together," prohibited for ordinary garments in *Levit.* xix. 19 and *Deut.* xxii. 11, may be used for the purpose of cerements (*Mish. Kilaim* ix. 4).

The garments worn by the dead are referred to in the following passages of the New Testament: *Matth.* xxvii. 59; *Mark* xv. 46; *Luke* xxiii. 53; *John* xi. 44; xx. 7; xix. 40; *Acts* v. 6.

The cerements were not invariably composed of the simplest material, nor were they "always white." Until about fifty years after the destruction of the Jewish State, gross extravagance was practised in the dressing of the dead. (Cf. *Josephus, Ant.*, XV. iii. 4; XVI. vii. 1; XVII. ix. 3; *Wars of Jews*, I. xxxiii. 9.)

Thus we are told (*T. B. Moed Kat.* 27b) that formerly the outlay concurrent on a death in a household was so great, that the suffering of the mourners was thereby

intensified, and the anxiety of having to provide the necessary expenses was often a greater source of sorrow to the bereaved than the actual loss they had sustained. Hence Rabban Gamliel left an injunction that he was not to be buried in many grave-vestments, and it is reported that he was interred in a simple linen shroud (see *Tosafoth*, i. l.).

We also find in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs that Judah's last command to his family, which he joined with the injunction to lay him in Hebron, was a protest against their enwrapping him in costly robes (*Testamenta* XII. *Patriarchum*, Ed. Sinker, p. 79. Cf. Chrysostom, *Homil.*, 84). The *Kolbo* enjoins (§ 114) that the dead should not be attired in splendid vestments, so as not to put to shame those who may not have the means to provide them. Thus in process of time a garment costing a sus became popular (T.B. *Moed Kat.* 27b), and the Jews have since been interred in the simplest and most inexpensive raiment (cf. *Josephus c. Apion*, ii. § 27). Up to the age of the Rabbis, the cerements used to be of different colours, such as red, white, green and variegated (Cf. T. J. *Kilaim*, ix. 14). Afterwards white predominated, and has since prevailed, doubtless because it is emblematical of purity and simplicity. Rabbi Jochanan requested to be buried in garments that were neither entirely white nor entirely black, so that should he come hereafter among the righteous he should feel no shame, and should his lines fall among the impious, he should have no reason to blush. (*Ibid.*) Rabbi Joshua wished to be buried in white garments, because he did not feel ashamed of his deeds. (*Beresh. Rab.* xevi. 5). Rabbi Jannai is reported to have addressed his children before death: "Bury me not in black garments, nor in white; not in black, because I might be found righteous, and I should then be as a mourner among bridegrooms; not in white, in case I should be approved in the sight of God, and I should then be as a bridegroom among mourners. Bury me rather in vestments that are

saturated with fine oil and have come from a maritime town." (T.B. *Shabb.* 114a.)

In T. B. *Megilla*, 26b, it is stated that antiquated scrolls of the Law, which were no longer fit for use in the synagogue, were employed for clothing the dead.

Interment in a simple reed-mat, *מחצלת של קנים*, was considered as a token of disrespect to the dead, and suggested in the eyes of the people that the departed had been placed under ban, and could not be united with the bands of spirits pervading the world. Thus, in the course of a conversation between two departed spirits, overheard by a Rabbi who was passing the night in the burying-place, one of the spirits remarked that she was buried in a mat of reeds, and could not therefore leave the grave (T. B. *Berach*, 18b).

The Rabbis seem to have been much exercised as to whether in the time of the resurrection the dead would come forth from their tombs naked or clothed. Rabbi Ibo (or, according to some, Rabbi Nathan) deduced from Job xxxviii. 14, that a man will arise from the grave in the same garments which he wore when he entered it (*Kohel. Rab.* v. 10). Rabbi Meir argued, *a minore ad majorem*, that if a mere grain of wheat, which is deposited in the ground in all its nakedness, comes forth at a later date with an abundance of vesture, how much more should the righteous, who are interred in grave garments (T. B. *Sanhed.* 90b, and cf. 1 Cor. xv. 37f). We also find a similar opinion expressed in T. B. *Kethub* 111b, עתידין צדיקים שיעמדו בלבושיהון, "Likewise Aischa asked the Messenger of God (Mohammed), Will no one awake clothed on the day of the resurrection? No one, he replied, but the prophets, their families (the martyrs), and those who fasted regularly in Ragab, Schabân, and Ramadân" (*Muhamm. Eschat.* ch. xxviii.).

The Jews were not the only nation of antiquity who bestowed such care upon the purification of their dead prior to interment. The Syrians (according to Bar Hebræus, *Book of Conduct*, 36v.) likewise washed their dead,

and afterwards clothed them in linen vestments. Jacob of Edessa, however, explains that the washing of the dead, which the Nestorians regarded as an ordinance of the Church, was nowhere commanded; it only became a recognised custom because at first those who died from severe ulcers were washed and anointed with fragrant oil of consecration, and the practice was afterwards extended to all alike. The laity and inferior clergy had their whole bodies washed; monks, nuns, anchorites, and the superior clergy had only the head, hands, and feet cleansed (*Die Canones Jacob's von Edessa*, p. 152.) With reference to the Nestorian ritual of the washing of the dead, see an interesting article by Isaac H. Hall in *Hebraica*, IV. 82. The learned author states that the dead is apparelled in white garments as in the days of his wedding. The Samaritans are likewise prepared for burial by their own friends; the whole body is washed, but especially the head (thrice), mouth, nose, face, ears, both inside and out (all this Mohammedan fashion), and lastly the feet (*Fragments of a Samaritan Targum*, etc., John W. Nutt). The Mandaeans also have a sacrament of the dying, referred to by Siouffi, 120 *seq.* They pour first hot and then cold water over the head of the dying man, and subsequently array him in the rastâ, in which he is to be interred. Dying without this ablution and attire causes the soul to remain up to the last day among the Matartâ's (*Die Mandaische Religion*, A. J. Wilhelm Brandt, 82). When one of the Anseyreeyah dies, the body is well soaked, and is washed with warm water. The corpse is then wrapped in a white shroud. Likewise among the Abyssinians, the body is wrapped in a white cotton shroud (*Social Races of Mankind*, Featherman, Div. V., 495f., 619). It was the custom in Greece that the women should wash and anoint the body, and then clothe it in clean white garments (Lucian, *De Luctu*, § 11; Sophocles, *Ædip. Colon.* 1602 f.; Homer, *Iliad*, XVIII. 350; XXIV. 582; *Odyss.*, XXIV. 4). It was also a rule with the Romans for the body to be bathed in hot

water and then anointed (Seyffert's *Dict. of Class. Antiqs.*). Among the Assyrians and Babylonians, "the corpse was wrapped in mats of reed and covered with asphalt; it was clothed in the dress and ornaments that had been worn during life—the woman with her earrings in her ears, her spindle-whorl and thread in her hands; the man with his seal and weapons of bronze or stone; the child with his necklace of shells" (*Social Life among the Assyrians and Babylonians*, A. H. Sayce, Chap. IV.).

The Jews in ancient times had also a number of valuable articles deposited with them in the grave (*Semach.* VIII.). Thus, when Hyrcanus opened the sepulchre of David he took out of it three thousand talents (Josephus, *Ant.* XIII. viii. 4; XVI. vii. 1). In like manner, Aristobulus was buried with many ornaments (Idem, *Ant.* XV. iii. 4). With regard to the Syrians the Patriarch John complains that costly garments and all kinds of finery were buried with the dead (*Ebed-Jesu in Mai-a-a-O*, 258, quoted by Kayser). In Greece, too, many tombs have been found to contain various articles that had been dear or useful to the living (Max Müller, *Anthropological Religion*, p. 264). Among the Polynesians it was customary to bury with the dead some article of value; a female would have a cloth mallet laid by her side, whilst her husband would enjoin his friends to bury with him a favourite stone adze, or a beautiful white shell worn by him in the dance (*Ibid*, p. 277). Among various South African tribes, "the ornaments, rings, armlets, tobacco pipes, and articles of apparel worn by the departed are placed in the grave, as well as his broken spear, walking-stick, and other small personal effects" (Rev. J. Macdonald, in *Journ. of Anthropol. Inst.* XIX.). In the case of the Jews, symbols and souvenirs of the calling of the deceased were sometimes suspended from the coffin (*Semach.* VIII.), modern Jews often deposited in the grave a bag filled with earth (by preference, dust of the Holy Land) which is placed under the head of the corpse.

When the dead has been thoroughly prepared for burial

he is placed in a coffin in a sleeping posture, the hands and feet being stretched out to their fullest length. The corpse must on no account be left in the attitude known as קמיוץ, *i.e.*, squeezed together as fish are sometimes packed, the head of one being pressed against the feet of another, and so on (T. J. *Nasir*, ix. 3). The corner of the prayer cloak, of which a fringe was torn off, is left hanging out of the coffin.

There is some uncertainty as to whether the dead were buried in ancient times with or without a coffin.

In early Biblical times there is certainly no mention of a coffin being used for the corpse, with the solitary exception of the case of Joseph (Gen. l. 26), and his interment in a coffin was no doubt owing to the fact that the Egyptians employed a kind of wooden case called ארון, to contain the embalmed dead. In the passages in the New Testament bearing upon the subject there is also no trace of such a practice.

In the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, however, it is remarked that they were placed in a coffin prior to burial. With regard to Simeon (p. 8; cf. *Book of Jubilees*, ch. xlv.), it is added that the coffin was of wood which did not decay. But this is, of course, only fanciful.

At the same time the Talmud contains several names for coffins, and the precise instructions which it gives with regard to the manner of interring persons of different status unquestionably points to the fact that a coffin was generally employed to contain the mortal remains in Rabbinic times. (Cf. T. B. *Moed Kat.* 24b גלוסקמא or דלוסקמא, = γλωσσοκομείον (also *Semach* III., and *Targ. Jon. on Gen.* l. 26); T. J. *Moed Kat.* I. 1, ארון של אבן; T. J. *Moed Kat.* I. 5, ארון של עץ; T. J. *Kilaim*, IX. 3, ארון; T. B. *Moed Kat.* 8b, ארון מנסרים.)

From these titles it would seem that coffins were made either of wood or of stone. For further particulars with regard to the material of the coffin, see T. B. *Moed Kat.* 8b; T. J. *Moed Kat.* I. 5.

The lid of the coffin (according to Rashi on *Shabb.* 152*b*) was called גולל, and each of the side-walls דופק. R. Jacob Tam (on *Kethub.* 4*b*) and R. Chananel (on *Chull.* 72*b*), on the contrary, take גולל to be the stone used to confine the coffin in the grave, and דופק the stone set at each side for the purpose of strengthening the stone above in its place.

A one-day old child (as among the modern Egyptians) is not borne to the grave in a coffin, but in one's arms. A child of thirty days has a miniature coffin that is easily portable גלוסקמא ובאגפיים. The same rule applies to children under twelve months. A child aged from twelve months to three years is placed in a coffin that can be carried on one's shoulders גלוסקמא ובכרתא. A child that has completed the age of three, or advanced beyond it, is regarded as an adult, and conveyed to the grave on a bier (*Semach.* III.).

In modern times poor and rich Jews alike are interred in a plain coffin, and conveyed to the grave in a hearse without trappings.

It appears that a stone used to be placed on the coffin of persons excommunicated by the Ecclesiastical Authorities of the Jews (*T. B. Berach.* 19*a*; *Moed Kat.* 15*a*). Thus we are told (*Mish. Ediyoth*, v. 6) that Akabya ben Mahalallel died under ban, and the Beth-Din cast stones upon his coffin. R. Jehuda says, however, that it was Eliezer ben Chanoch who was "banned." When he died a stone was laid on his coffin by order of the Beth-Din. Hence it is to be inferred that one throws stones upon the coffin of one who has been excommunicated and died under ban. In *Semach.* V. it states that when an excommunicated person (מנודה = ἀποσυνάγωγος, John ix. 22) dies, a representative of the community should place a stone on his coffin as a symbol of the fulfilment of the punishment of סקילה. The custom was, however, abolished by the Rabbis of the Middle Ages. It was possibly based on the case of Achan, who, having been as it were excommuni-

cated for having taken of a devoted thing (מִנְחָה), had a great heap of stones raised over him (Josh. vii. 26). Cf. also 2 Sam. xviii. 17, where the same is related of Absalom. But it appears that a similar custom prevails among the Arabs. (See Waldemar Sonntag, *Die Todtenbestattung*, p. 197.)

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*(To be continued.)*

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